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Troubles in British Columbia.

The clouds which have hung over Rossland as a centre for several months burst in July with the not unexpected result of a strike on the part of the Rossland Miners' Union. The declared reason for this strike is sympathy with the smelter men at Northport, and for an increase of muckers' wages in Rossland of fifty cents per day. In consequence of the strike something like twelve hundred men were put into idleness, and up to the middle of August over 700 men had left that camp to seek work elsewhere.

It is claimed locally that the strike is purely the work of professional agitators, and that the vote to call out the men was "rail-roaded" through at the July meeting. At this meeting less than one half of the members of the Union were present, and the figures published seem to justify the statement as to the matter being in the hands of a clique; only 258 ballots, out of a total membership of some 700, were cast in favour of the strike. Up to the present time over 700 men have taken their packs and departed for fresh fields, most of the staff of the War Eagle and Centre Star Mines has been dispensed with, and the members have left the camp; the construction of the large addition to the Bonnington Falls power plant has been stopped; the large copper smelting furnace at Trail has had to be blown out, and a period of trade depression and uncertainty has been in full existence now for four or five weeks.

At the time of writing, no attempt for a settlement has been made either by the Union or the mining companies, nor is there any immediate hope of such an attempt. The managers of the large mines have authorized the statement that it is impossible for their companies to grant the advance, or to increase their expenses in any way, in the present condition of their mines. In the B.C. Government Mines Report (reviewed elsewhere), the average gross value of the ore shipments from Rossland in 1900, as figured by the REVIEW, was \$10.72 per ton, that of the LeRoi Mine was \$9.17 per ton, and the shipments from the War Eagle and Centre Star Mines (together) was \$14.80 per ton. From the published reports of the companies named, and from the various statements that have appeared in the B.C. newspapers relative to this strike, it is evident that the actual cost of this ore to the mines is not less than eight dollars, and probably equals \$9.00 per ton, especially if all the costs, such as mining, transportation, smelting, management, marketing, depreciation and taxes are included, as they should be.

In view of these figures and facts, and taking into consideration that it is well known that no large bodies of high-grade ore have been encountered in development work, it is easy to believe that Messrs.

Macdonald and Kirby have stated nothing but the truth when they said that the margin for profit now existing would be eliminated if they were to further increase existing expenses. Hopes for the resumption of work then must be confined to the expectation that the Miners' Union will recede from its position and abandon the strike. This view is intensified by remembering that the average value of the shipments from the Le Roi mine in 1900 was \$9 17 per ton, and rumours have been brought east that the 104,000 tons shipped during the first half of the present year have averaged less in value than the shipments for 1900; if such rumours (which the REVIEW does not vouch for) are true, the LeRoi for this year has already lost the small margin of profit it had last year, and the strike may be a blessing in disguise to that company.

At this time, also, an organization called the British Columbia Mining Association has presented a memorial to His Excellency the Governor General in Council, praying for the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into the conditions of excessive taxation and oppressive legislation existing in British Columbia, with a view to recommending measures for the relief of the mining industry of the Province. Inquiry at Rossland leads to the belief that this British Columbia Mining Association is the organization known as the British Columbia Mine Owners Association, and if such is the case its public utterances are entitled to very serious consideration.

The memorial is a lengthy document that has appeared in several papers in Eastern Canada, and been commented upon. To very briefly summarize the memorial, it begins the statement of its case by saying that the white population of the country before the mining excitement of the last decade amounted to 65,000 people; that in the year 1900 this white population had reached the number of 110,000. It then goes on to say that the prospectors of the Province have nearly all disappeared—"The flow of capital into the Province has been practically cut off, the metallic production is at present decreasing; numbers of producing mines have closed down, and those operating, with but few exceptions, have ceased to pay dividends." Commenting on this, it is fitting to observe that, during the period referred to in this memorial, the metallic production of the Province has increased from less than \$600,000 a year to over \$11,300,000 a year, a growth which does not strike the REVIEW as "decreasing" or at all discouraging. The statement that the prospectors have disappeared may be true of inland districts, but certainly is not true of the coast country, nor of the northern sections of British Columbia. The figures that we have just quoted give the emphatic lie to the statement that the metallic production is decreasing. The report of the Provincial Mineralogist for 1900 shows a distinct increase of over three millions in the metallic production for the year. This increase is equal to 37%.